

THE DOMINION OF JESUS CHRIST OVER
THE ELEMENTS OF NATURE.

A
S E R M O N,

PREACHED AT THE
MEETING-HOUSE

IN
LITTLE WILD-STREET,
LINCOLN'S-INN-FIELDS,

NOVEMBER 27, 1798:

IN COMMEMORATION OF
THE GREAT STORM IN 1703.

By ROBERT WINTER.

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ADVERTISEMENT.

IN publishing this discourse, the author complies with the wishes of some partial friends who heard it. If it should in any measure answer the design of the worthy person, who instituted the annual commemoration of the storm in 1703, by preserving some facts respecting it, and leading to that religious improvement which he had chiefly in view, the author will be highly gratified. He wishes it also to be considered, as a tribute of respect to the church and congregation in Little Wild-Street, and to the memory of their late excellent pastor, the Rev. Dr. STENNETT, whose friendship he hopes ever to esteem one of the greatest blessings of his youth.

ADVERTISEMENT

IN publishing this notice, the writer
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 also to be considered as a friend in respect
 to the church and congregation in this
 White Church, and to the memory of their late
 excellent pastor, the Rev. Dr. Brewster,
 whose friendship he has ever to them
 one of the greatest blessings of his youth.



A
S E R M O N, &c.

MARK IV. 41.

And they feared exceedingly, and said one to another, What manner of man is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?

AMONG the multitudes who witnessed the great storm in 1703, which we are assembled to commemorate, were many who feared God, and deeply felt the power of the Gospel. When the tempest had ceased, and the danger was over, these persons would be very likely to express their admiration and gratitude in the words which I have now read. Viewing the Lord Jesus Christ, as the appointed Sovereign of the natural, as well as of the moral world, they would enter into the spirit of these views,

views, which, on this great occasion, operated on the minds of his disciples. It is probable also, that when we have heard the howling tempest, when we have viewed the desolations which it has made on the land, and have read of its more tremendous effects on the ocean, the reflection in the text has not unfrequently occurred to our minds.

When I was requested to engage in this service, my thoughts were immediately directed to this part of the history of Jesus Christ. And it struck me, that it would be a very seasonable improvement of the tremendous storm, which nearly a century ago spread destruction through our own country, and a great part of Europe, to aim at exciting your veneration of that divine Redeemer, to whom you owe infinite obligations, and whom *even the winds and the seas obey*.

The storm to which the text refers, happened in the evening of a day, which had been devoted by our blessed Lord to many wonderful works of power and mercy, and also to public instruction on
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the great affairs of his kingdom. The scene of his labours on this useful and happy day, was the border of the Lake of Galilee. There, multitudes assembled to hear him, and he addressed them from a vessel which lay on the shore.

When the labours of the day were concluded, he proposed to his disciples to *pass over to the other side* of the lake. The vessel from which he had spoken to the large assembly, being at leisure, they embarked in it, and were accompanied by several *other little ships*, filled with people, who were probably desirous of knowing more concerning this celebrated teacher, whose fame was now very great. In the midst of their passage, *there arose a great storm of wind*, which agitated the sea to such a degree, that *the waves beat into the ship*, till it was full of water, and ready to sink. Jesus, fatigued with extraordinary exertions, his mind rendered calm by the reflection, that the day had been spent in labours of love, had fallen asleep in the stern of the ship, undisturbed by all the confusion about him. His disciples, with
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an anxiety naturally occasioned by their situation, immediately awoke him, and said, *Master, carest thou not that we perish?* Or as it is more strongly expressed by Matthew, *Lord, save us ; we perish^a. And he arose and rebuked the wind, and said unto the sea, Peace, be still.* It is scarcely credible, that in such a moment of terror, when nothing but instant and inevitable destruction was before his eyes, an impostor could have had such command of himself, as to assume the apparent self-possession, which these words imply, and the unlimited authority which they express. But if on the brink of a watery grave, it had been practicable thus to have carried on a fruitless deception, it cannot be supposed, that the great Author of nature would have given such a sanction to the word of an impostor as immediately followed. For when *he had rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, Peace, be still,* astonishing to relate, *the wind ceased, and there was a great calm.*

^a Matt. viii. 25.

Having

Having given this proof of his authority over the elements of nature, he turned his rebuke to his disciples, and said unto them, *Why are ye so fearful? How is it that ye have no faith?* “ If my cause is divine, as you profess to believe, could you imagine that God would suffer all the great designs of my mission to be frustrated by a storm? Or had you so little dependence on my friendship, as to suppose, that I should permit you to be lost, while I was preserved?”

And now, what must have been their feelings? The storm, which had filled them with terror, was gone. The wind, which had roared with fury, ceased. The sea, which broke in on their little vessel with dreadful impetuosity, was become smooth. And he, who amidst the raging tempest was asleep, and in their timid apprehensions careless of them all, had proved himself Lord of the tempest and the ocean. *They feared exceedingly.* This was a fear, not of distrust, but of veneration. Penetrated with astonishment and awe, *they said one to another; it was the*

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sentiment

sentiment of every mind, and which was spontaneously and mutually communicated, *What manner of man is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him.* He had before shewn them his power in healing the diseases of the human body, but now he discovered an authority still more majestic, in hushing the fury of the tempest, and stilling the waves of the sea.

Let us now attend to a few remarks, founded on this wonderful story.

I. It affords incontestible evidence to the divine authority of our Lord's mission.

The sudden removal of a tempest was surely *a miracle which no one could perform, except God were with him^b.* No parts of nature are less under human control, than the wind and the sea. If the power of Jehovah appears more conspicuous in some of its exertions, than in others, its most illustrious displays in this lower world are in reference to *the stormy winds which fulfil his word^c,* and to the waters of the mighty deep, which obey his sovereign mandate. The most exalted monarch who

^b John iii. 2.

^c Psalm cxlviii. 8.

rules the empires of the earth, the most sagacious philosopher, who has searched into the secrets of nature, and with whom, to a limited degree, "knowledge is power," here feel their insufficiency. The winds and the waves make them know and confess, that they are men.

If then at the command of a man, for such only was the appearance of Jesus, the wind ceased, and there was a great calm; who can doubt, that he was owned and approved of God? Who can any longer refuse to admit his claims to the character of the Messiah? Where is the hardened infidelity, which shall refuse to bow the knee to him, whom *the wind and the sea obey?*

This too was a work, which no impostor could imitate with sufficient accuracy, to impose on the senses of men. Many wonderful works may be counterfeited by ingenious artifice. But what artifice can raise an imaginary tempest, can blow like a hurricane, or raise the waters of the ocean into the resemblance of a storm? The senses could not have been imposed on.

on. It must have been a reality. And the reporters of this wonderful work are worthy of the fullest credit. They have related that, of which they were eye-witnesses. Had the report been false, there were many in the other ships who could have disproved it. Whilst, therefore, we read this impressive story of the power of Jesus Christ over the wind and the sea, we cannot hesitate in admitting his claims to the character he professed, we cannot but acknowledge him to be the Son of God.

II. This miracle exhibits the union of majesty and compassion in the character of Jesus Christ.

The majesty which appears in the whole transaction must have struck every beholder, and must deeply impress every one who reads the narrative. God can no doubt achieve the greatest of purposes by whatsoever instruments he pleases. The rod of Moses, and the mantle of Elijah, commissioned by him, become the occasions of events far out of the usual course of nature. But in the air, the language, the conduct of Jesus Christ on this occasion, there
appears

appears a personal dignity, becoming *the only begotten of the Father*^d. He speaks to the raging elements as their great proprietor, *by whom all things were created, and without whom was not any thing made, that was made*^e. When I read, that *the Word who was made flesh and dwelt among us*^f, *was with God, and was God*^g; when the effect produced by another miracle of a singular nature was this, that *the witnesses of it came and worshipped him, saying, Of a truth thou art the Son of God*^h; and when I further reflect, that Jesus Christ accepted the homage of men, which the highest order of human beings refusedⁱ; I cannot but consider this, as the tribute of the wildest and fiercest elements in the world of nature to their great Lord, and as a testimony publicly and awfully borne to a majesty truly divine. Who but he that *hath gathered the wind in his fist*^k, and *hath measured the waters in the hollow of*

^d John i. 14.

^e John i. 3.

^f John i. 14.

^g John i. 1.

^h Matt. xiv. 33.

ⁱ Rev. xix. 10.—xxii. 8, 9.

^k Prov. xxx. 4.

his

*his hand*¹, could with efficacy *rebuke the winds, and say to the sea, Peace, be still?*

But the miracle recorded in this part of the evangelical history, was a work also of compassion. In subduing the raging storm, Jesus Christ had an immediate respect to the preservation of his disciples, and the rest of the company, who were on board the different vessels. Their lives spared in the moment of imminent, impending danger, would be monuments inscribed with the kindness of Jesus Christ, as well as his power. But he looked much further than to the mere preservation of their lives. The evidences of power and grace, which had been so wonderfully exhibited, would attach them to his cause, and would operate as a guard against future returns of unbelief. And considered in its more remote tendency, this miracle was a blessing to distant ages. *The pearl of great price*^m was in the ship; the charter of salvation was there. Had the vessel been wrecked, and the passengers on board perished; the glory of ancient prophecy would have been

¹ Isa xl. 12.

^m Matt. xiii. 46.

obscured,

obscured, and the evidences of the Gospel destroyed. The blessings of pardon and immortality would have been destitute of their noblest seal. And to millions, who have now heard *the joyful sound*ⁿ, it would never have been reported; *Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners*^o. Our happiness, our salvation, my brethren, were concerned in that wonderful deliverance. It was a miracle of mercy to the world. Let our hearts never fail to adore that grace, which saved the sinking vessel, freighted as it was with blessings so divine.

III. It is matter of unfeigned joy to the disciples of Christ, that the government of the world is placed in the hands of one, who displayed such an union of power and love.

In the political and in the moral world, events frequently take place, which may be compared to a tempest. By the storms of civil commotion, palaces and thrones and empires have been shaken and even destroyed. Changes have arisen, which

ⁿ Psalm lxxxix. 15.

^o 1 Tim. i. 15.

to a feeble undiscerning human eye, may seem to oppose the wise, righteous, and merciful government of the Almighty. Persecution may rage against *the church of the living God*^p; and bitter animosities may prevail among its professed friends. The interests of the Redeemer may be awfully threatened. The hearts of the truly pious may *tremble for the ark of God*^q, and may be ready to doubt, whether the kingdom which he hath established by his Son deserves the high character assigned it, that *it cannot be moved*^r.

Whenever these thoughts arise in our minds, let us pause and reflect, that he who *rebuked the wind, and said unto the sea, Peace, be still, and there was a great calm*, has equal power to restrain the turbulence of contending parties, and to hush the angry nations into tranquillity. His promise, his oath, his blood stand engaged, that *his church shall be built on a rock, and that the gates of hell shall not prevail against it*^s. We cannot doubt either his ability to

^p 1 Tim. iii. 15.

^q 1 Sam. iv. 13.

^r Heb. xii. 28.

^s Matt. xvi. 18.

over-rule all things for good, or his readiness to accomplish his own and his Father's great and gracious designs.

IV. How essential to the happiness of the children of men, is an interest in the friendship of the Son of God.

Dreadful is it indeed, beyond the power of language to describe, for the Lord of nature to become our enemy. When he, whom storms and tempests obey is provoked to manifest his displeasure, *the kings of the earth and the great men, and the rich men, and the chief captains, and the mighty men, and every bond-man, and every free man, may well hide themselves in the dens, and in the rocks of the mountains, and say to the mountains and to the rocks, Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb: for the great day of his wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand!* And of whom will he be the enemy? Of none but of those who will not come unto him, that they may have life^u. They who spurn at his authority,

^{*} Rev. vi. 15, 16, 17.

^u John v. 40.

and despise his love, will indeed *be ashamed before him at his coming*^w.

On the other hand, he who can subdue all nature into his service, will prove a potent and a never-failing friend. Whatever storms of private or public distress break on the head of the real Christian, his best interests are secure. His immortal ALL, is intrusted in the hands of one who can rule the elements of nature, and whose power is always exerted for the preservation of his friends. And he adopts the cheerful language of the afflicted apostle, who though *persecuted*, was not *forsoaken*, though *cast down*, was not *destroyed*^x: *I know, whom I have believed, and I am persuaded, that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day*^y. Then, when *the earth and the heavens shall flee away before his face, and the dead, small and great, shall stand before God*^z, all who have chosen Christ for their Saviour, and have yielded themselves unto him, shall hear his gracious voice saying

^w 1 John ii. 28.

^x 2 Cor. iv. 9.

^y 2 Tim. i. 12.

^z Rev. xx. 11, 12.

unto

unto them, *Come ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world^a*. That vessel shall weather every storm, which is under the conduct of IMMANUEL.

V. How reasonable is it, that men should bow to the authority of him, whom *even the wind and the sea obey!*

Inanimate nature reproves and condemns the folly of those, who will not have Christ to rule over them. Do the elements yield him homage, and shall I refuse it to him, I who am placed under his moral dominion, who avow myself his disciple, who, if I *belong to him^b*, am redeemed by his blood? Let the turbulent passions and contending interests of the human mind all submit to the government of *the Prince of peace^c*; let his word be obeyed, and his energy sought and regarded; and the storm, which often agitates the human bosom, will subside into a calm. The empire of truth, of religion, of Jesus Christ, will restore tranquillity to

^a Matt. xxv. 34.

^b Mark ix. 41.

^c Isa. ix. 6.

the disordered mind, and will with surprising effect say to the angry and opposing passions, *Peace, be still.*

Such has been the efficacy of the Gospel, whenever it has been received into the heart. The change produced in the appearance of nature, when a word from Jesus Christ turned the storm into a calm, is but a faint resemblance of that moral spiritual change which takes place in the mind, when constrained by the energy of divine love, it bows in subjection to him as its right proprietor and chosen Lord. Whilst the conscience of *the wicked*, who refuse to wear his yoke, is *like a troubled sea, whose waters cast up mire and dirt, and there is no peace to them^d*, those who yield him the obedience of their hearts, find *the work of righteousness to be peace, and the effect of righteousness quietness and assurance for ever^e*. Let us then lay to heart the conclusion of our Lord's excellent discourse on the Mount, which, whilst meditating on storms and tempests, should most powerfully affect and influence our

^d Isa. lvii. 20, 21.

^e Isa. xxxiii. 17.

minds.

minds. *Whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, who built his house upon a rock. And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the wind blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not, for it was founded upon a rock. And every one that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, who built his house upon the sand. And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house: and it fell, and great was the fall of it^e. Happy they! who indeed do the sayings of Christ, and so give the only evidence that can be given of an interest in his mediation. No desolating storm can destroy their security, or blast their prospects. They are now favoured with an hiding-place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest^s. And beyond the grave, fixed in the promises of their heavenly Father, and sealed in the blood of their dear Redeemer, there remaineth a rest for the people of God^h.*

^e Matt. vii. 24, 25, 26, 27. ^s Isa. xxxii. 2. ^h Heb. iv. 9.

Storms and tempests have in every age visited our world. Their natural and secondary causes have been investigated by philosophers; but their great *original* cause is the appointment of God. They have been in some instances the executioners of his vengeance; in some, the means of awakening to repentance a sinful and careless people; and in others, the occasions of illustrating his unexpected kindness in preserving, at the moment of danger, those whose lives were awfully threatened, and of conducting their grateful attention to him *who stays his rough wind in the day of his east-wind*¹. And it deserves also to be considered, that these violent commotions of the air are frequently the means of dispersing noxious vapours, and of counteracting those contagious disorders to which, in the calmer state of the atmosphere, the bodies both of beasts and men are very much exposed.

To preserve on the minds of serious people, and to awaken in the breasts of the inconsiderate a proper sense of the hand of

¹ Isa. xxvii. 8.

God, as it was displayed in one of the most tremendous storms which have ever been known in the history of the world, was the laudable design of the worthy Mr. TAYLER, who instituted this yearly service. In compliance with this design I now proceed to mention a few particulars respecting it.

It was in the year 1703, that this great tempest visited Europe, and spent its main force on the British Islands. A strong west wind set in about the middle of November. Instead of subsiding, every day, and almost every hour increased its force. On Wednesday the 24th it blew furiously and did some damage. Its violence was still augmented so much, that on Friday the 26th it became awfully tremendous, and the most dreadful consequences were with reason apprehended. It was not, however, till Saturday the 27th, about six in the morning, that it arose to its greatest height. Those who have written any account of this calamity agree in their testimony, that it exceeded any storm which had happened in the memory of man, or that
could

could be found in any history. The violence of the wind, the length of its continuance, the prodigious extent to which it spread, and the innumerable calamities produced by it, rendered it one of the most awful events in the history of the natural world, of which we have any knowledge, the general deluge excepted. Blessed be God, that such judgments are indeed *his strange work^k*, and that the wind is not often excited to such dreadful fury. In this city and its neighbourhood, more than 800 dwelling-houses were laid in ruins, in most of which the inhabitants were personal sufferers, and some lost their lives. Above 2,000 stacks of chimnies were blown down in and about London. The lead which covered the roof of 100 churches was rolled up, and hurled in prodigious quantities to great distances.

The devastation spread also through the country. Stacks of hay and corn innumerable, were thrown down and damaged. Multitudes of cattle were lost. In one level in Gloucestershire, on the banks of

^k Isa. xxxviii. 21.

the Severn, 15,000 sheep were drowned. A person set himself the task of numbering the trees which were torn up by their roots; but when he had proceeded through but a part of the county of Kent, he had counted 250,000, when he relinquished the undertaking.

But the greatest calamities were, as might be expected, on the water. In the river Thames, at least 500 wherries, 300 ship-boats, and 100 lighters and barges were entirely lost, besides a much greater number that received considerable damage. The ships destroyed by this tempest were computed to be 300. Of the royal navy 12 ships were sunk with most of their crew. The Eddystone light-house near Plymouth was precipitated into the surrounding ocean, and in it perished Mr. Winstanley, its ingenious architect. "Having been frequently told, that the edifice was too slight to withstand the fury of the winds and waves, he was accustomed to reply contemptuously, that he only wished to be in it when a storm should happen. Unfortunately," may we not say, as a warning

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against

against presumptuous confidence, " his desire was gratified. Signals of distress were made, but in so tremendous a sea no vessel could live, or would venture to put off for their relief¹."

But it was a time not only of calamity but of deliverance. Some very remarkable providential interpositions took place. Above two hundred men cast away on the Goodwin-Sands were saved by the humane and spirited exertions of Mr. Thomas Powell of Deal. And to omit many other instances, several of you recollect the uncommon preservation, which your late excellent pastor, and my most valued friend^m, frequently related on these occasions, of seventeen persons in a house in St. Martin's-Lane, a few of whom ran out of the house at the first alarm; but the rest were found alive and very little hurt, under the ruins occasioned by the falling of a stack of chimnies, which carried the roof and every floor in the house down to the ground.

¹ Belsham's History of Great-Britain, from the Revolution to the Accession of the House of Hanover.

^m SAMUEL STENNETT, D. D.

It was a dreadful perversion of the moral design of this tremendous event, that in the very next week after it took place, the plays called the Tempest and Macbeth were acted twice; and one of them, on the night of that very day, on which the storm rose to its greatest height. In these dramatic representations, not only were thunder and lightning imitated, but additions were made to the original representation, by a mimicry of the falling of houses, and the breaking of limbs. And of all this, the insensible and profane audience, for not more honourable epithets do they deserve, signified their highest approbation.

But although there were these and many other marks of insensibility, effects also of a very encouraging nature were produced. It is a pleasing illustration of the general credit in which serious religion was then held, that a day of fasting and humiliation was appointed by authority. The Proclamation by Queen Anne wore such an air of piety, that I must take the liberty of reading you the introductory part of it.

“ Whereas

“ Whereas by the late most terrible and dreadful storms of wind, with which it hath pleased Almighty God to afflict the greatest part of this our kingdom, on Friday and Saturday the 26th and 27th days of November last, some of our ships of war, and many ships of our loving subjects, have been destroyed and lost at sea, and great numbers of our subjects, serving on board the same, have perished; and many houses, and other buildings of our good subjects, have been either wholly thrown down and demolished, or very much injured and defaced, and thereby several persons have been killed; and many stacks of corn and hay thrown down and scattered abroad, to the great damage of many others, especially the poorer sort; and great numbers of timber and other trees have by the said storm been torn up by the roots in many parts of this our kingdom: A calamity of this sort so dreadful and astonishing, that the like hath not been seen or felt in the memory of any person living in this our kingdom, and which loudly calls for the deepest and most solemn
humiliation

humiliation of us and our people: therefore, out of a deep and pious sense of what we and all our people have suffered by the said dreadful wind and storms (which we most humbly acknowledge to be a token of the divine displeasure, and that it was the infinite mercy of God, that we and our people were not thereby wholly destroyed) we have resolved, that a General and Public Fast be observedⁿ."

Accordingly it was observed with great solemnity and decorum by all orders and denominations. And the Protestant Dissenters, in the most perfect consistency, as I conceive, with their objections to the interference of the civil magistrate in matters of religion, voluntarily united with their countrymen in bewailing a common calamity, and entreating for themselves and for the public the mercy of God.

The different places of worship on that day were uncommonly crowded. And it was a circumstance tending much to con-

ⁿ This and several other particulars mentioned above are taken from a Sermon preached Nov. 27, 1713, by the Rev. BENJAMIN STINTON.

firm

firm impressions before made, that at the moment of worship, apprehensions were entertained, of another storm coming on. "God seemed," says a lively and pious writer in the preface to a sermon, which he preached and published on the occasion, "to be repeating the former quarrel, though not in the same degree of loudness and extent of ruin; as if he would catch our departing seriousness back again, and restore something of that awe that we felt in the great storm°."

But the good effects produced by this alarming event were not confined to a day of humiliation. A deep and lively impression was left on the hearts of many, especially of those, whose possessions, families, and lives, had been remarkably preserved. And among other pious fruits of the storm was the annual service which we are now attending. Our late worthy friend, who so ably presided among you on these and on other occasions, often mentioned, that in his earlier days he remembered

° Bradbury's Sermons on Public Occasions. Vol. i. Sermon. 5.

many,

many, who regularly attended this service from year to year, with feelings such as those only could possess, who had been personally interested in the events which they commemorated. He recollected also, how they gradually dropped off, till at length not an individual remained who had witnessed the terrors of 1703. Thus do the generations of men moulder away! And thus does every annual commemoration serve as a memorial of human frailty and mortality.

To us, who consider the great storm but as an historical fact, it cannot be equally interesting. Yet when we think, how many valuable men, how many excellent Christians, how many able and faithful ministers were preserved, the benefit of whose labours is yet continued, though their lives have long since concluded, we may feel in reference to this event impressions similar to those, which arise from considering our interest in that storm, which the word of Jesus subdued on the Lake of Galilee.

In fine, let us all commit our immortal interests into the hands of a Covenant-God,
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and a Divine Redeemer. Then whatever storms of nature agitate the material system, whatever political convulsions spread confusion among the nations of the earth, whatever distresses fall on the church of God, we shall be secured and upheld by him, *who maketh the storm a calm*^p. And in that great catastrophe, when *the heavens shall pass away with a great noise*, when *the elements shall melt with fervent heat*, when *the earth, and the works that are therein shall be burnt up*^q; when *the trumpet shall sound*, when the graves shall be opened, when the dead shall be summoned to judgment, we shall be admitted, through infinite mercy, and a Saviour's merits, to *those new heavens, and to that new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness*^r. Amen.

^p Psalm cvii. 29. ^q 2 Pet. iii. 10. ^r 2 Pet. iii. 13.

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